

Blessing for Torah Study:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ–הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי-תוֹרָה.

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with commandments, and commanded us to study words of Torah.

Lunchtime Torah Express: Vaera

Based on a sheet by Ari Lev Fornari

Exodus 7:1-5

(1) יהוה replied to Moses, “See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet. (2) You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land. (3) But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. (4) When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements. (5) And the Egyptians shall know that I am

שמות ז':א-ה'

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה
נִתְּנִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעָה וְאַהֲרֹן
אַחֶיךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאָךְ: (ב) אַתָּה
תְּדַבֵּר אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ וְאַהֲרֹן
אַחֶיךָ יְדַבֵּר אֶל-פָּרְעָה וְשַׁלַּח
אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: (ג) וְאֲנִי
אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת-לֵב פָּרְעָה וְהִרְבֵּיתִי
אֶת-אֹתוֹתַי וְאֶת-מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: (ד) וְלֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵכֶם
פָּרְעָה וְנִתַּתִּי אֶת-יָדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-צְבָאוֹתַי אֶת-עַמִּי
בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: (ה) וַיֵּדְעוּ
מִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּנִטְוִתִּי

יהוה, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt
and bring out the Israelites from their midst.”

אֶת־יָדִי עַל־מִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי
אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתּוֹכָם:

Sforno on Exodus 4:21:4

(21) וְאִנִּי אֶחְזֹק אֶת לְבוֹ (21) *for if he could not endure the plagues he would let the Israelites go, not because he was finally humbling himself before the Lord to do His will, but only in order to get relief from the plagues. This was not a good enough reason to grant him relief; therefore G'd reinforced his natural stubbornness.*

Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 6:3

They sinned intentionally and eagerly transgressed until they deserved to be denied *teshuvah*, which is the “remedy.” Therefore it is written in the Torah: *I will harden Pharaoh's heart* (Ex. 14:4) – since he initially sinned of his own initiative and abused Israel, who were living in his land, as it says, *Come, let us deal cleverly with them* (Ex. 1:10), judgment was rendered to deny [Pharaoh] *teshuvah* until [God] punished him – therefore the Holy Blessed One hardened [Pharaoh's] heart.

Shemot Rabbah 13:3

(3) Another explanation: For I have hardened his heart - Rabbi Yochanan said: Does this not provide heretics with an opportunity to open their mouths to say that he had no means of repenting, as it says "For I have hardened his heart". Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said to him: Let the mouths of the heretics be stopped up.

Rather, (Mishlei 3:34) If it concerns the scorners, he scorns them. When the Holy One Blessed be He warns a man once, twice, thrice and he doesn't repent, and G-d will close his heart against repentance so that He should not exact vengeance from him for his sins. So to with the wicked Pharaoh, since Hashem sent five times to him and he took no notice, G-d then said: "You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; well, I will add impurity to your impurity". Hence, "For I have hardened his heart". What does "I have

hardened" imply? That G-d made his heart like a liver (כבד) into which even if boiled a second time no juice enters; so also was the heart of Pharaoh made like a liver, and he did not receive the words of G-d. Hence, "For I have hardened his heart".

Moshe Greenberg on Ex. 7:3 *I will harden Pharaoh's heart*

The verse raises major moral and theological problems. If Pharaoh is foreordained to reject Moses' plea, if God will arrange for the confrontation to continue, how can Pharaoh be held responsible for his actions and how can we justify his being punished for what God causes him to do? "Although 'hardening of the heart' seems deterministic, events flow naturally from the ambitions and conflicts of a human being, Pharaoh, who is seized with the delusion of self-sufficiency. While events unfold under the providence of God, their unfolding is always according to the motives of the human beings through whom God's will is done without realizing it... Pharaoh conducted himself in conformity with his own motives and his own Godless view of his status. God made it so, but Pharaoh had only to be himself to do God's will."

Megillah 10b:25-26

This is because the Holy One, Blessed Be He, does not rejoice at the downfall of the wicked. And Rabbi Yohanan said: Why has it been written (Exodus 14:20): "This one did not draw near to that one the whole night."? The ministering angels sought to recite a song, [but] the Holy One, Blessed Be He said: The work of My hands is drowning in the sea, and you are reciting a song???

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Commentary on the Torah, commentary to Exodus 7:3

I will harden....Regarding the heart of Pharaoh, we have found three meanings that are subtly different: "I will make hard "I will make heavy", "I will strengthen."

"Hard": to be solid and strong, not to absorb impressions, and not to be influenced by anything.

Vaera: On the Value of Stubbornness, Avital Hochstein

<https://www.hartman.org.il/vaera-on-the-value-of-stubbornness/>

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that this stubbornness or "hardening" that Pharaoh experiences can be divided into three types based on the language that the Torah uses to describe it: "I will harden" Regarding this we find three types: "I will strengthen," "I will make heavy," and "I will harden."

1) "Hard:" Being rigid, without registering any influences, without being influenced by anything that passes us.

2) "Heavy:" Being a person of weight, able to be influenced, but with a significant gap between the actual impression and the willingness to act based on it. Sluggish.

3) However, "strong:" Steadfast, fully opposing to submit despite a full recognition, totally obliterating the influence

R. Hirsch describes three different forms of this attribute and how it manifests itself in Pharaoh. Three forms which are similar, but not identical.

The first is characterized by rigidity, that is characterized itself by an ignoring of the environment, a rigidity that blocks any outside influences. This kind of behavior can be seen when Pharaoh is completely unimpressed and unmoved by Moshe's pleading, the suffering of Israel, or even the plagues that affected him and his people directly.

The second is characterized by heaviness. This heaviness is not about ignoring; someone whose heart is heavy can absorb information from his surroundings, but this is insufficient to influence him, to get him to act upon

those potential influences. They don't propel him to act in the direction where the information points. This phenomenon is evident in the way that Pharaoh reacts to the second plague of frogs...Lastly, Pharaoh exhibits strength. According to Hirsch, behavior that is defined by strength is self-aware and defiant. The lack of change in it is not defined by being weighed down or passive inertia, but rather an active refusal to be moved. He is aware that he doesn't want to move or change because these actions are perceived by him as giving in.

Davis, Ellen F.. Opening Israel's Scriptures at 47.

A second angle of vision comes from another biblical writer, the prophet Ezekiel, who seems to suggest that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is God's just punishment for Pharaoh's spiritual pride. Pharaoh believes that he himself is a god; Ezekiel quotes him as saying, with childish diction and intent: "The Nile is mine and I made it for myself" (Ezek 29:3). Because Pharaoh presumes to be more than human, God makes him less than human; Pharaoh loses the proper function of his heart, the organ of moral and spiritual discernment.

*Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Sara Rich
Based on a sheet by Ari Lev Fornari*